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MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents
FROM: Rebecca Holcombe, Secretary of Education
SUBJECT: Mentoring for New Principals and Technical Center Directors - Act 20 of 2011
DATE: August 7, 2014

Research on new school leaders suggests they often feel intense, unrelenting stress as they figure out how to lead their schools and negotiate the expectations of their communities and school boards. The challenge can be amplified by the isolation many new principals and technical center directors feel: they are no longer peers with their faculties, yet particularly in small schools, they may not have easy access to colleagues who are grappling with similar challenges. While many new principals and technical center directors bring fresh insights and pedagogical knowledge to leadership, they have not had the opportunity to master the practical side of leadership at the school level in the moment. And, leadership of a school is high-stakes; new leaders are often learning on the job, but doing so in a very public way, where every decision matters and is scrutinized.

Especially as they first enter the role, principals and directors need access to **high-quality mentoring** and opportunities for coaching and support that are tailored not only to their individual needs, but also to the unique contexts of their school, districts and communities.

Superintendents, districts and boards also need these new leaders to have access to mentors. Across Vermont, approximately one-third of principals leave their positions each year. This lack of stability and continuity has a detrimental effect on Superintendents' and Districts' ability to sustain improvements in teaching and learning.

We know from research on mentoring that when individuals have consistent access to high-quality mentoring, they are more likely to report greater job satisfaction, stronger commitment to their organizations, and less interest in leaving their current positions. Our hope is that if you ensure your new principals and technical center directors have access to high-quality mentoring, we can support more stability and less leadership turnover in our schools.

Providing access to high-quality mentoring for your new principals is not just good practice; it is the law.

Under Act 20 of 2011, when a new principal or technical center director is hired, who has not previously served in such capacity, the superintendent must work to ensure that the new principal or technical center director receives mentoring supports during at least the first two years of employment. To read the Act in its entirety, please click [here](#):

These mentoring supports must be provided in consultation with the Vermont Principals' Association, who at present has 50 trained mentors available. These mentors have been trained to provide supports that are consistent with best practices and research-based approaches that were identified jointly by the Vermont Principals' Association (VPA) and the Vermont Superintendents Association (VSA).

Of course, superintendents have reasonable latitude in determining, with the principal or technical center director, the best options for mentoring support. However, we expect that the supports are consistent with the law's requirements for a successful mentoring model based on research and best practice.

It is the responsibility of the superintendent to assure that the district is in compliance with this law. In doing so, the superintendent should:

- ❖ Engage the services of a trained mentor who has completed the appropriate training and/or has received appropriate national certification. Please inform the Vermont Principals' Association that mentoring services have been arranged via emailing Ken Page at kpage@vpaonline.org or,
- ❖ Engage the services of a school administrator with extensive experience who can serve as a mentor and has demonstrated effectiveness in the six "School Leadership Mentor Competencies." (See final page for a summary of these competencies.)

If this second option is the one that you are employing, you should first contact Ken Page (kpage@vpaonline.org) at the Vermont Principals' Association or Jeff Francis (jfrancis@vtvsa.org) at the Vermont Superintendents Association.

In either case, we appreciate your help in confirming that your new principals have a mentor.

A few supervisory unions have highly developed systems for mentoring which meet the guidelines described above. For other systems, one advantage of working with VSA and VPA is that external mentors provide a safe, low-stakes mentoring relationship, outside the supervisory union and perceived lines of accountability, so that new principals can try out ideas and openly discuss challenges without fear of repercussions.

Thank you all for the tremendous and challenging work you do to lead systems and keep our educators focused on the most important work of all: improving teaching and learning.

NAESP SCHOOL LEADERSHIP MENTOR COMPETENCIES

Competency One: An effective mentor sets high expectations for self-development in high quality professional growth opportunities.

Strategies:

Continues adult learning practices and seeks ongoing professional development
Practices professional reflection and networking

Competency Two: An effective mentor has knowledge of and utilizes mentoring and coaching best practices.

Strategies:

Utilizes effective oral and written communication skills
Applies effective listening skills and provides constructive feedback
Possesses the ability to communicate a clear vision
Understands and practices adult learning theory

Competency Three: An effective mentor is active in instructional leadership.

Strategies:

Keeps current on educational and leadership issues
Participates in professional organizations and local, state, and national events, i.e. conferences, workshops, seminars, etc.
Takes a leadership role in the development and study of professional practice

Competency Four: An effective mentor respects confidentiality and a code of ethics in the mentor protégé relationship.

Strategies:

Initiates routine discussions pertaining to confidentiality
Exhibits trustworthy behavior
Encourages open and reflective conversations initiated by protégé

Competency Five: An effective mentor contributes to the body of knowledge as it pertains to principal and administrative mentoring.

Strategies:

Conducts action research in collaboration with protégé
Utilizes assessment information to adjust the mentoring process as needed
Maintains reflection portfolio for self and encourages the protégé to do the same

Competency Six: An effective mentor fosters a culture that promotes formal and informal mentoring relationships.

Strategies:

Engages in professional outreach activities which include the use of technology and networking
Acknowledges the need for mentoring and coaching throughout the career continuum